



The Historic Center of L'Aquila

Abruzzo, Italy

High in the hills overlooking the Aterno River, and surrounded by medieval walls, sits the thirteenth-century city of L'Aquila. The city flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as an important trading center for wool and saffron. The city was conquered and fortified by the Spanish in the early sixteenth century, and was rebuilt largely in the baroque style after an earthquake hit the area in 1703. The city was organized in quarters around a series of squares and churches, though modern development over the last two centuries has modified its medieval urban structure. Tragically, the historic center was largely destroyed by an earthquake in 2009, including severe damage to the main squares and churches.

Since the earthquake, the historic city center remains a “red zone” and is mostly inaccessible due to strict safety regulations. Many of the local civic, religious, and social structures cannot be used, and the residents of the historic center are currently living in temporary housing outside of the damaged area. Four years after the catastrophe, it is important to raise awareness about the serious and still unresolved situation persisting in L'Aquila. Without proper repair and restoration of the historic core, the city will lose important cultural heritage as well as a significant economic and community asset. While disaster response can be a long and difficult process, there is a need to renew the calls for recovery and revitalization of the historic urban core to ensure revitalization of the community.